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Nestle and Baby Bottle Disease

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By: Kaitlyn Drees

In an article from “El Laberinto”, a publication of the Chicano-Latino Indian American Student Union at the University of Iowa, past students of the University attempted to reach out to the public to stop the increasing global aggression from the Nestle Company. The document was published in April of 1982, and the author was a student at the University during that time. In their article they cite a woman named Maria Cano. She and her family came to the United States from Mexico in 1929, and she started a Spanish language interpreter program at the University of Iowa Hospitals. Before her death in 1983 she was given an award from the Iowa Human Rights Organization. The author used her social justice work as inspiration for this article because they were a part of the Chicano-Latino Indian American Student Union on campus, and Maria Cano was an influential part of the Chino-Latino Indian American community. The intended audience of this journal is a group of staff and students at the University of Iowa. The message of this journal is that big corporations and companies, such as Nestle, use global aggression to try to sell their products. The Nestle company pushes for the use of baby formula in third-world countries, and women in these countries are not trained how to use these methods of feeding their children correctly. Nestle sends out samples of their products to these countries, and once the women start using them it is hard to get their babies to go back to breast feeding (El Laberinto, 1982, p. 5). The purpose of this document is to get the word out that in a time period where a Nestle Boycott is going on, these big companies, such as Nestle, don't care about the well-being of their consumers.

The historical context of this set of documents is 1982-1984 when there was a Nestle Boycott going on all over the world. During that time there were many things going on in the private sector of business that were disturbing and students all around the world began to speak up against these types of injustices. The Baby Bottle Disease article is specifically about the Nestle Company. Even though the Nestle Company is based in Switzerland they have a lot of footing and influence all over the world (The Observer, 1982, p. 4). At this time in history they had begun to market their products for use in third world countries. They persuaded mothers in the third world that their babies would be better off by switching them to using Nestle Baby Formula. Not only did these babies get sick from the mother's lack of access to clean drinking water to add to the formula, many of them died from infections and illnesses that could have been avoided by having the mothers continue to breast feed their children (El Laberinto, 1982, p. 5). There were many arguments in newspapers around the time that this article was published. I was able to find a digital copy of The Observer from this time, and there were many opinion pieces arguing for and against the Nestle Company. The Nestle company participated in a televised debate about the issues revolving around their global aggression in March of 1982 (The Observer, 1982, p. 4). A few years before this debate a "Nestle Boycott" began in the United States and was popular among college students before it spread to Europe and eventually Switzerland.

In this specific article of El Laberinto they have a call to action to students and faculty of the University of Iowa to help support the cause by mailing their thoughts and opinions as well as their complaints and concerns to the heads of the Nestle Company in the United States as well as in Switzerland. At the end of the article they have a poem by a woman named Maria Cano Martinez who happened to be working as the head of the interpreter program at

the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics at the time (El Laberinto, 1982, p. 5). She started the interpreter program to help people that had a hard time communicating to their doctors and caretakers while they needed medical attention. In the poem she says, “somos libres/ tenemos derechos/ que siempre now negaban” meaning that we are free; we have rights that were always denied to us. She was an influential part of the social justice going on at the University of Iowa and across the globe in the 80’s as well as later on in history. In 1993, the University of Iowa established an award for service in her name (Cano, 1985).

The rhetorical purpose of this article is to persuade the audience to support the boycott of the Nestle Corporation that was being put on by people all across the country. The young people and staff of the University of Iowa as well as the Latino-Chicano Indian American Student Union chose this boycott as a focus for their time and efforts during the year of 1982. They believed it was a good cause to put their effort in. Their passion for this subject was evident in strong choice of words that they used in their article. Their content was straight to the point. They let the readers know why they believed in the cause and why they, as citizens of a developed country, should also care that the Nestle Company was trying to infiltrate the third-world. They provided evidence and support as well as providing an entertaining article for their publication. The Latino-Chicano Indian American Student Union even gave the audience a way of getting in touch with the heads of the Nestle company here in New York as well as abroad in Switzerland so that they could take part in getting the message across that the Nestle company’s global aggression was getting out of hand.

The authors did a good job when they wrote the article “Nestle & Baby Bottle Disease”. They portrayed the issue as urgent and did a good job of letting the audience know how they could help. One of

the ways that they proposed that the viewer could help the cause was to stop buying Nestle products. They did it in a way that made it easy to know what things the public shouldn't continue to buy. They named off the different categories of foods and goods that the Nestle company provided as well as their partnerships with other companies. For the reader, this brings forth a feeling of shame for unknowingly supporting the company that has aggressively been teaching the women of the third-world how to feed their children in ways that will only harm them. They create a feeling of guilt for the reader that makes them obligated to help the cause. In their segment "Nuestro Despertar", they say "somos libres/ tenemos derechos", meaning that we are free, and we have rights. This sentiment makes the viewer feel that it is their right and duty to be educated and free of oppression; it is their duty to stop the global aggression going on in the third world so that they can share that freedom.